

JULY 26, 1984

On and on, the drouth spreads as water holes and lakes and rivers dry up. Every morning the daily out of San Angelo features a new city that is rationing water. Yet with all the clatter, no one seems to know whom to blame for the dry weather.

I know the Spanish are the ones who brought the first livestock to Texas. Also, the Conquistadores were the ones that used up about 500 years of the redmen's patience and goodwill in about six months. After the Indians lost their temper, I think they were guilty too of trickery and deceit. If the tribes hadn't put on such a convincing act that they wanted to keep the Shortgrass Country, I don't think a special price on scalping knives and a bargain deal on tomahawks could have provoked those people to so much as spend an afternoon defending the land they called "Bleak Wampum."

Actually, the Spaniards didn't show a lot of enthusiasm for the area. Their kings and queens worked on a gold standard that'd make the present day definition of that system sound like the local supermarket's policy on dog food coupons. The Isabels and the Phillips liked their foreign policy to show big returns. Somewhere in the back rooms in a small book were the royal programs on colonizing and settling new lands.

The next two culprits (and here I really have a case) were the railroads and the pioneers. Label them busy minds and busy bodies. Both parties galloped off out here like there were deep rivers and natural lakes and enough rushing water to quench the thirst of 44 European townships plus part of Russia.

The dadgum railroad didn't prefabricate one depot building, or skimp on one set of houses for their employees. They made the pioneers even more land crazy by setting up docks and shipping pens. Mile after mile of rails were spiked to heavy timber with. out anybody glancing to the side of the roadbed and seeing what the natural menu of life was.

"Burn the stumps and plow as deep as the blade will go!" they shouted. "Timber will come forever from those far away mountains. Wade or swim or irrigate all you please. Those springs will always replenish the pond."

Farmers were turned back east when the crops wilted. Then my forebears came along and tried every species of four-legged domestic animal that can be driven or hauled. Away they rode after the mustangs and the wild cattle. Their cry, day and night, was land. "Change drill bits and go deeper to a stronger water sand. Lease the minerals and buy more country. Stretch a mile of that woven wire a week. Natural boundaries or natural limits don't want. We'll put a feed store right there and bank right across the street."

Relax, I am not going to reveal any of our trade secrets, or stomp on the family crest. Everybody acted in good faith except the Indians that lured the white eyes out to this dry land. Where they messed up was in underestimating the Whiteman's determination. The chiefs and the medicine men thought that by the time the grey beards had spent a few winters in: West Texas, they'd be more of a problem for the Indians along the Mohawk River in New York state than they would their people down this way.

Soon the newspapers can stop writing about the drouth. Soft rains will precede torrents, and floodwater will chum into whirlpools of white foam from a brown base of new drinking water. Autumn will be an overcast with warm days and cool nights, misty and fresh, and decorated by wild mints and yellow dandelions. So bang on, cowboy. It's

going to feel so good to watch the grass put on new runners and the ground take on new life.